



Valles Caldera Trust
90 Villa Louis Martin, Box 359
Jemez Springs, NM 87025

T: 505-661-3333
www.vallescaldera.gov
info@vallescaldera.gov

October 2, 2014

“EARTHWATCHING” ON THE VALLES CALDERA

The unsung heroes of most communities and many an organization are the volunteers who pitch in where no one else can. They don't volunteer for recognition, accolades or reward. They volunteer for a variety of individual reasons. Some volunteer on their own; others work through an organization like Los Amigos de Valles Caldera, the Sierra Club, WildEarth Guardians, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, or the Great Old Broads for Wilderness; all of which have volunteered thousands of hours on the Preserve. Earthwatch added its name to this growing list of volunteer groups in 2012.

Earthwatch is an international organization that works with scientists to develop field experiences that result in world-class research. Its mission is:

“Volunteers are not paid because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.”

Anonymous

“... to engage people worldwide in scientific field research and education to promote the understanding and action necessary for a sustainable environment.”

Earthwatch provided on the ground volunteers to help Dr. Ana Steffen with a three-year cultural resources project in Obsidian Valley. The goal was to excavate the prehistoric obsidian quarry site to determine how the archaeological deposits there developed over time and then use that baseline information to compare with future Preserve excavations.

“We didn't have the funding to do the project until we partnered with Earthwatch,” said Steffen. “It was an efficient way to get the work done that



*Three excavation units in Obsidian Valley
Photo by Elizabeth Burns*

we otherwise couldn't afford. Adding the opportunity for direct public involvement that Earthwatch brings made the partnership especially valuable"

Anna Freitas was one of the Earthwatch volunteers this past September. The retired financial management professional has travelled the world volunteering with Earthwatch projects during the last eight years. However, the Obsidian Valley project was the San



*Anna Freitas (top) and her husband, Paul dig deep for artifacts
Photo by Elizabeth Burns*

Francisco native's first archaeological dig.

"It's a crash course in archaeology with hands on experience in the field," she said. "You get the added reward of finding artifacts each day."

During the evenings the citizen scientists were treated to lectures about the natural and cultural history of the Preserve. One lesson in particular was instrumental helping them identify artifacts during the dig.

"We were taught how to 'knap' obsidian into tools like the Native Americans used," explained Freitas. "The shapes and flakes we created the night before helped us identify the same shapes we found during our dig the next day."

Nature did the "digging" for Freitas' most exciting find. It came during her first day in the field. Freitas and her team were inspecting a dry wash when they came upon three pottery sherds uncovered by flooding from recent monsoon rains. Archaeological artifacts are not the only treasures Freitas discovered. "We worked surrounded by the peaceful quiet and beauty of the Preserve with elk grazing nearby," she noted.



Earthwatch volunteers sift through the history of the Valles Caldera

This was the third and final year of the project but Steffen says she is working with Earthwatch to begin a new project next year at Cerro la Jara which will bring new groups of eager volunteers to help.

Since its founding in 1971 Earthwatch has participated in 1400 conservation and research projects in 120 countries. The organization has recruited than 100,000 citizen scientists, like Anna Freitas, to join expeditions that worked those projects in the field. Each Earthwatch participant contributes to a pool of project grant funds in addition to their time and labor on the Preserve. For more information on what they did go to

<http://earthwatch.org/expeditions/encountering-the-prehistoric-people-of-new-mexico>.